

Kentucky's African-American Veterans

Before Carl Brashear, before the Tuskegee Airmen, before Benjamin O. Davis, Charles Young was breaking barriers and setting standards for African-Americans in the U.S. Military.



Born into slavery in a log cabin near Maysville, Kentucky, Young rose through Army ranks to [become the highest-ranking black officer](#) in the Regular Army until his death in 1922.

He was the third [African-American](#) graduate of [West Point](#), the first black U.S. [national park](#) superintendent, first black [military attaché](#), first black to achieve the rank of [colonel](#), and highest-ranking black officer in the Regular Army until his death in 1922.

Today Kentuckians are working to get recognition for Col. Young. Just last week, on Feb. 2, Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) introduced a bill into Congress “to bestow the Congressional Gold Medal” on Colonel Charles Young for his historic service and contributions to our nation.”

Col. Young is a critical piece of Kentucky military history and Kentucky history in general. The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs supports efforts to increase awareness of Col. Young’s accomplishments and give him the recognition he has earned, including the project to restore his Maysville birthplace.

In Maysville, several groups are working to [raise funds to restore Col. Young’s birthplace](#).



(Since 2013), the county government in Mason County, KY, together with the Kentucky Heritage Council, the Kentucky African-American Heritage Commission, and the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, are trying to preserve Young's birthplace and make it available to the public, while also raising awareness of his significant contribution to American history.

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Craig Potts, executive director of the Kentucky Heritage Council, adds that Mason County has a deep connection to the Underground Railroad and a lot of related tourism. "This site kind of fit into the general African-American context that people go there to experience," he says.

The county bought the 38-acre farm for \$220,000 in October. The impetus for the purchase was the possibility that the cabin would be moved by the owners to enhance the value of the property, which includes a more recently-built brick house and barn. Once Potts and the Heritage Council advised Mason County executives that some of the historic value of the cabin would be lost if it were moved, Gallenstein and the county commissioners put together a proposal to buy the land.

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Currently, Potts says, the Heritage Council and the county are looking for funding opportunities to rehabilitate the property and make it amenable to visitors. There's also a larger push underway nationally to have Colonel Young posthumously promoted to the rank of Brigadier General in the U.S. Army, spearheaded by the National Coalition of Black Veteran Organizations and the international African-American fraternity, Omega Psi Phi.

"Recognition in the national eye to preserve his birthplace is, I think, timely," Potts says, adding, "I can't stress how excited we were that in these tight financial times, the Mason County Fiscal Court was willing to spend this kind of money." It's an endeavor as remarkable as Young himself."